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THE LEFT'S LATIN AMERICAN LOBBY

INTRODUCTION

U.S. policy in Latin America, particularly in Central America, has been the subject of much discussion in recent months. The debate has been joined by citizens and organizations of varying points of view. However, much of the discussion has been dominated by several organizations specializing in Latin American affairs. While these organizations portray themselves as "objective" observers of Latin America, this often is not the case. Rather, analysis of Latin American issues is offered mainly by organizations whose fundamental ideological perspective is sharply suspicious of, if not openly hostile to, U.S. policy in the region. Following a 1982 press conference arranged by political and human rights organizations to protest United States aid for El Salvador, Wall Street Journal columnist Suzanne Garment observed: "There is by now--on the American left--a whole cottage industry using the language of human rights and social justice to delegitimize our imperfect efforts" to nurture democratic, anti-communist regimes in Latin America.¹

Belonging to this "cottage industry" are:

- The North American Congress on Latin America
- The Washington Office on Latin America
- The Council on Hemispheric Affairs
- The Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations
- The Central American Historical Institute
- The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador

¹ Suzanne Garment, "Capital Chronicles," Wall Street Journal, December 3, 1982, p. 22.

The pioneer of this "cottage industry" is the North American Congress on Latin America. It made its debut in 1966 as the research arm of the radical left Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The Washington Office on Latin America followed in 1974 and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs appeared the next year. Death squad activity in El Salvador expanded the constituency of American officials and church workers radicalized by right-wing violence. Robert T. White, President Carter's last ambassador to El Salvador, returned to the United States to become chairman of the Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations, established in 1982 by the Center for Development Policy. During that year, Nicaraguan Jesuit Father Alvaro Arguello, a representative on the Sandinista-controlled Council of State and director of the Instituto Historico Centroamericano, opened an affiliated office, the Central American Historical Institute, to project a positive image of the Sandinista revolution.

All these organizations advocate that the Salvadoran government share power with the Marxist guerrillas operating in that country--despite the fact that the government was chosen in free elections witnessed by hundreds of foreign observers. These groups, meanwhile, condemn the Salvadoran government's inability to halt human rights violations, while they almost entirely ignore human rights violations in Nicaragua. In short, the leftist information brokers on Latin America seem interested exclusively in exposing rights violations in countries backed by the U.S. while neglecting violations in leftist regimes. Knowing just who these brokers are, and how they operate, is essential for those attempting to understand U.S. policy toward Latin America.

NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS ON LATIN AMERICA--NACLA

Background

The North American Congress on Latin America or NACLA, as it is generally known, provides much of the research used by the Washington-based opposition to the Reagan Administration's policies in the region. Established in 1966 by a group of activists in the University Christian Movement, academics, returned Peace Corps volunteers, and representatives from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society, NACLA was designed to be a research arm of the 1960s movement for social upheaval. Today, NACLA's bi-monthly "Report on the Americas" (circulation 11,000), and books written by staff members, are used by university Latin American Studies Departments and excerpted in anthologies.² Human rights bureaus like the Washington Office on Latin America cite NACLA reports as recommended reading.

² NACLA openly acknowledges its ideological roots and political bias; thus it is surprising that its publications are so prominent in Latin American Studies curricula in U.S. universities. Recently, students at George

Funding

NACLA was established first in the National Council of Churches offices in Manhattan and later had separate offices in both New York and Berkeley. As documented by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, NACLA is supported financially by mainline Protestant churches through the National Council of Churches' Latin American Division and through specific projects like the Presbyterian hunger program.³ It also receives funds from leftist foundations such as the Stern Fund, which gave \$12,000 in 1983.

Approach to Latin American Issues

In its publications, NACLA acknowledges its dedication to "anti-imperialism" and the "political use of information"⁴ for openly Marxist-Leninist goals. NACLA's research director, Steven Volk, agreed that his organization's views "were not necessarily that of the Administration." NACLA's main contribution to the lobby against the Administration's Central American policies is in its long, in-depth reports on social, political, and economic conditions in the region, and the U.S. response to these realities.

NACLA openly acknowledges its left-wing bias, even though other Latin American lobby groups have grown more circumspect, given the changing foreign policy climate since the defeat of the Carter Administration and the mounting congressional concern about the Soviet bloc's strategic objectives in the region. At the same time, despite the organization's theoretical ties to Marxist-Leninism, it can respond to the changing political realities of Capitol Hill. This flexibility is a key element in NACLA's understanding of the "political use of information." For example, in 1980 the NACLA July-August El Salvador report depicted the DRU (Salvadoran guerrilla movement) as Marxist-Leninist. However, four years later some guerrilla forces felt that power-sharing with the Salvadoran government would be the easiest path toward political control. Accordingly, the March-April 1984 El Salvador report sought to alleviate congressional fears that such a strategy would undermine the country's still fragile democracy. The report's sources said that "the FMLN-FDR('s) efforts to broaden the base of its alliance, like its

Washington University questioned the appropriateness of a professor using NACLA materials in her class. This spring, NACLA staffers taught a course on Central America at the New School of Social Research. NACLA's popularity among faculty in Latin American Studies departments throughout the United States offers, perhaps, the best evidence of the ideological bias of the majority of academics in this field as well as their representative organization, the Latin American Studies Association.

³ A Time for Candor: Mainline Churches and Radical Social Witness (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Religion and Democracy, 1983), pp. 35, 39.

⁴ Helen Shapiro, "NACLA Reminiscences, An Oral History," NACLA Report on the Americas, September/October 1981, pp. 45-47.

willingness to seek a pact to guarantee U.S. national security,... signify a real moderation--not merely a tactical modification--of the utopian proposals sketched out by the Left."⁵

Just as NACLA is a strong proponent of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement, it backs up the Sandinista propaganda war against its domestic and foreign detractors. NACLA reports have repeated and sought to document the official Sandinista party line. This is accomplished generally through attacks on internal Nicaraguan opposition groups and inclusion of remarks by government officials and representatives of the so-called popular or "people's" church backed by liberation theologians. Addressing the issue of Sandinista repression of the Miskito Indians, for example, NACLA's 1982 "Target Nicaragua" issue repeated Sandinista charges that anti-Sandinista pro-democratic insurgent forces were responsible for the deaths of Miskito leaders. The reports' authors called the accusations leveled against the Sandinistas a product of a CIA campaign to discredit the revolution.⁶ NACLA reports never have explained why thousands of Indians continue to flee from Nicaragua.

NACLA ideological support for the Sandinista cause is evident when NACLA describes the regime's imprisonment of three business leaders who signed a letter critical of the revolution as a "reassertion of authority."⁷ NACLA's Marxist-Leninist roots surface more prominently when it openly attacks the Western media as a product of the "continuing monopolization of the print and electronic media, sensitivity to the interests of moneyed advertisers and the obvious pressure to maintain good relations with pro-Administration sources...."⁸ What prompted this NACLA attack was media coverage of the Reagan Administration's assertions that the Sandinistas were exporting arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas.

NACLA staffers spearhead efforts to document and protest U.S. corporate investment in Latin America, particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes. NACLA's activities in this area have sparked charges from businessmen, like D. J. Kirchhoff, president of Castle & Cooke, a multi-national corporation, who claim that NACLA profiles of companies attract guerrilla sabotage of their Latin American assets or kidnapping of company executives.⁹

⁵ "El Salvador 1984," NACLA Report on the Americas, March/April 1984, p. 47. It is worth comparing NACLA's soothing words, particularly while Latin American lobby groups are pressuring Congress to call for power-sharing between guerrilla and government officials, with the pragmatic view of Pulitzer Prize winner Shirley Christian who has essentially called the rebels' new conciliatory stance a "smokescreen." Shirley Christian, "Rebel Factions," in Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal, eds., Crisis and Opportunity: U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1984), p. 244.

⁶ George Black and Judy Butler, "Target Nicaragua," NACLA Report on the Americas, January/February 1982, pp. 35-37.

⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

⁹ D.J. Kirchhoff protested NACLA's activities in a letter published in the December 1979-January 1980 issue of Presbyterian Layman, p. 8.

NACLA did make its own views on economics quite clear in Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn's book, Agribusiness in the Americas. There, the authors asserted:

It is only in societies organized along socialist lines--where production and distribution is organized by the principle of social equality rather than private profit--that the possibility of ending hunger exists. China is a dramatic example.¹⁰

WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

Background

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) was founded in 1974 to address human rights conditions in Latin America. It draws broad support from Protestant and Catholic churches in the United States. Located in the United Methodist Church building near Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., WOLA is probably viewed as the Latin American information broker closest to the Washington political mainstream. Yet WOLA coordinates much of its efforts with such openly radical leftist groups as the Institute for Policy Studies; it shares their tendency to ignore or minimize abuses in socialist countries, while attacking rights violations in U.S.-backed countries.

WOLA seeks to influence the media and Congress through its publications: "Update," a bi-monthly analysis of Latin American news, "Washington in Focus: A Bulletin on Congressional and Executive Activities Relating to Latin America," human rights reports prepared with Americas Watch and the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, discussions and press conferences for Latin American visitors critical of U.S. foreign policy, and testimony before Congress.

Funding

WOLA's double standard--concentrating on human rights violations in U.S.-backed countries while ignoring those in socialist states--reveals the political bias of the United Methodist board of Global Ministries, which pays the salary of Joseph T. Eldridge, WOLA's director, and in a broader context, helps fund the National Council of Churches. The Institute for Religion and Democracy already has documented mainline Protestant church support for radical political movements in the United States and in such nations as the People's Republic of Vietnam.¹¹ The United Methodist Board funds the National Network in Solidarity with the

¹⁰ Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, Agribusiness in the Americas (NACLA/ Monthly Review Press, 1980), p. 11.

¹¹ The Institute on Religion and Democracy, A Time for Candor: Mainline Churches and Radical Social Witness (Washington, D.C.: 1983).

Nicaraguan People, which was founded "to support and defend the Nicaraguan revolution," and other solidarity groups that assist the Salvadoran rebels.

Representatives of the National Council of Churches, the American Friends Service Committee, and the United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries sit on WOLA's board, along with other Protestant and Catholic Church officials and members of religious orders. Church organizations supplied WOLA with \$124,602 of the \$340,866 it raised in 1983.¹² WOLA also receives funds from the Arca Foundation, the Bydale Foundation, Fund for Tomorrow, Inc., International Human Rights Internship Program, J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation, Menil Fund, the Needmor Open Society Fund, Oxfam/America, Oxfam/England, the Scherman Foundation, and the North Shore Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program. In 1984, WOLA received over \$200,000 from the Ford Foundation.

Approach to Latin American Issues

As its 1983 annual report states, WOLA's main goal is "to keep human rights considerations in the public eye as a national priority for the U.S. foreign policy agenda."¹³ But a survey of its activities suggests that the organization is mainly interested in exposing rights violations in countries friendly to the U.S. Typical is WOLA's treatment of conditions in Nicaragua since the Sandinista revolution. Beyond a few cursory remarks in the 1983 annual report, nothing is said of censorship, imprisonment of labor and political opposition leaders, or the lack of due process in Nicaragua. Except for a reference in the annual report to the fact that Nicaragua's "Miskito, Suma, and Rama Indians have endured great afflictions and are living testimonies to the scourge of war,"¹⁴ there is no discussion of the killing and imprisonment of the Indians by the Sandinista regime. In contrast, several paragraphs of the annual report detail a single incident in which Salvadoran Army troops reportedly killed Indian civilians.

WOLA director Joseph T. Eldridge has defended his organization's guarded approach to human rights violations in Nicaragua as nothing more than a reaction to the poor quality of human rights reports produced by both the government's National Commission of Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, and the independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights. Eldridge said that both commissions were "ideological" and produced reports with clear political objectives in mind. Eldridge could not, however, explain precisely why the independent commission, whose reports were widely used by the media and human rights groups before the revolution, was now considered to be too biased to be relied upon.¹⁵

¹² 1983 Annual Report.

¹³ 1983 Annual Report (draft, pages are not numbered).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Nicaragua section.

¹⁵ Eldridge explained his approach during an interview with the author on April 24, 1984.

WOLA is also silent on the subject of human rights conditions in Cuba. Indeed, judging from WOLA publications, Cuba might just as well not exist. Reviewing WOLA's analysis of military conflict in Latin America would leave a reader virtually unaware of Fidel Castro's support for Latin American revolutionary movements. WOLA's refusal to consider Castro's exploitation of social injustice in Latin America and the organization's tolerance of abuses in socialist countries creates a false picture for its audience of journalists, legislators, and religious groups who are prompted by the WOLA material to protest U.S. policy in Central America.

In 1983, WOLA's activities included background briefings for congressional staff members on the current situation in El Salvador, and testimony at three congressional hearings on such subjects as human rights conditions in Guatemala and the Reagan Administration's record of compliance with existing human rights legislation. WOLA sponsored visits to the U.S. from Central America by such leftists as Guillermo Ungo and Ruben Zamora of the FMLN-FDR (the Salvadoran guerrilla front), and Sr. Lisa Fitzgerald, an American nun working in Nicaragua and a vocal critic of Administration policies who testified before congressional hearings on covert aid.

WOLA worked with the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights in an investigation into the murders of four American churchwomen in El Salvador and co-chaired the Human Rights Working Group of the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy. This coalition is a lobby group originally established to halt U.S. aid to South Vietnam. Since then, it has promoted diplomatic recognition and aid to the communist regimes of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Angola, while calling for the end of aid and trade with the Philippines, Thailand, El Salvador, Chile, and other U.S. allies. WOLA publications last year include: "Common Questions: El Salvador and Certification," "U.S. Foreign Policy and Political Developments in El Salvador, 1979-83," and "The Invasion of Grenada and World Opinion."

Defending WOLA's approach to human rights issues in Central America, Joseph Eldridge argues: "If U.S. policy was [sic] supporting repression in Cuba, we would scream to high heavens. Our response is toward the U.S. government. What it does or does not do."¹⁶ Eldridge's explanation, however, fails to answer why WOLA is such a sharp critic of authoritarian governments and so lenient toward socialist regimes. Eldridge explains that lack of information on human rights violations in Nicaragua rests on the issue of "how you can effectively document such conditions in a war." And yet, despite El Salvador's much more bloody civil war, WOLA remains confident in the ability of Tutela Legal, the archdiocesan justice and peace office in San Salvador, to collect reliable information on civilian casualties.

¹⁶ Update, May/June 1983, p. 4. Sr. Mary Hartman a member of the Sandinista Human Rights Commission appeared with other Evangelical ministers at a March 22 lunch to discuss "the current status of religion in Nicaragua."

WOLA's exposure of human rights violations by authoritarian U.S. allies is a worthy exercise for a church-affiliated institution that seeks to relieve the plight of the oppressed. However, the double standard the organization applies to Nicaragua and Cuba, two countries in which Christians are persecuted, suggests that WOLA places partisan politics, instead of moral values, as its first priority.

COUNCIL ON HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS (COHA)

Background

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) was established in late 1975 to "promote the common interests of the hemisphere; raise the visibility and increase the importance of the inter-American relationship; and encourage the formulation of rational and constructive U.S. policies towards Latin America."¹⁷ Focusing on human rights violations throughout the Caribbean, and Central and South America, COHA exposes attacks on labor unions, press freedom and political opposition groups in its bi-monthly "Washington Report on the Hemisphere," human rights reports, press releases, and congressional testimony. An analysis of the organization's publications, however, reveals a pattern exaggerating the abuses of right-wing governments or movements, while understating those of leftist regimes or guerrilla groups. This calls into question the integrity of COHA's sources and data that it marshalls against the Reagan Administration's policies in Central America.

The organization's statement of intent asserts that "COHA subscribes to no specific political credo nor does it maintain partisan allegiances. It supports open and democratic political processes, just as it condemns authoritarian regimes that fail to provide their populations with even the minimal standards of political freedoms, social justice, personal security, and civic guarantees."¹⁸ At the same time, even COHA's founder, Lawrence R. Birns, admitted in a 1982 interview that while "we were critical of the Carter Administration 50 percent of the time....We are critical of Reagan 100 percent of the time."¹⁹

Birns's specific antagonism towards pro-U.S. Latin American governments is rooted in his experience in Chile as a senior economic affairs office with the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America during Salvador Allende's government. The subsequent crackdown on human freedoms in Chile by General Augusto Pinochet caused Birns, a former professor of Latin American Studies at the New School for Social Research in New York, to immerse himself in the concerns of Chilean dissidents. He participated in the Mexico City meeting of the International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the Chilean Junta, a creation of

¹⁷ Statement: "Regarding the Work of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lynn Bennett and Charlotte Hayes, "Watchdog Group Draws Criticism," National Catholic Register, May 30, 1982, p. 1.

the World Peace Council, a Soviet front group. COHA was essentially a by-product of this meeting.

Through Birns's contacts in the White House and the State Department, COHA exerted considerable influence on the Carter Administration's human rights policies. Today, COHA receives support from U.S. organized labor. The Graphic Arts Communications Union, which donates the space for COHA's Washington office, the Newspaper Guild, whose president, Charles A. Perlik, Jr. is COHA's chairman, and other AFL-CIO-affiliated unions continue to fuel its shoestring budget.

Funding

Birns opened COHA's New York and Washington, D.C., offices (the New York office is now closed) with the help of Orlando Letelier, Allende's first ambassador to the U.S. Letelier was then a co-director of the Institute for Policy Studies' Transnational Institute. Papers carried by Letelier at the time of his murder in 1976 revealed that he was in the pay of Beatriz Allende, wife of a high-level official of the Cuban intelligence agency, the DGI. Birns admitted he received funds from Letelier in a March 1977 interview.²⁰ Institute for Policy Studies co-founder Richard Barnet was also an early supporter of COHA. He served on Birns's board of trustees until the Letelier incident highlighted the IPS's possible links with Cuban intelligence.

Approach to Latin American Issues

COHA's annual human rights and press freedom reports, well-publicized in the media, are critical of abuses of both right- and left-wing regimes in Latin America. But while virtually all civilian deaths in El Salvador are blamed on the country's military and rightist death squads, there is no reference to the Salvadorans who are victims of guerrilla violence.

For Nicaragua, the reverse is the case: unverified government reports of atrocities committed by the anti-Sandinista insurgents are repeated as fact, while the Sandinistas' rights violations are rationalized as an understandable reaction to U.S. "aggression." COHA's report on human rights in Nicaragua noted "that there is cause for concern about human rights in Nicaragua, but also accounts for the U.S. role in exacerbating that situation through its support for the anti-Sandinista contra guerrillas--a factor totally ignored by State [Department]."²¹ COHA's 1981 press release reported abuses in Nicaragua, but offered speculation culled from unidentified "local experts" that Reagan Administration

²⁰ "Council on Hemispheric Affairs," Information Digest, March 11, 1977, p. 78.

²¹ "Integrity of State Department's Findings Challenged by COHA Report," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, 1984, no date.

and State Department officials could be "deliberately attempting to provoke the Sandinista leadership into a paranoid reaction that would further discredit its democratic credentials."²²

The Sandinistas' assertions of respect for social justice are often taken at face value in COHA press releases and reports while similar statements by the freely elected Salvadoran government are dismissed or ridiculed. COHA attacked the carefully monitored Salvadoran elections in a March 1984 press release as a "downright phony event in a country without a free press and with a downright nasty security force."²³ In an April 2, 1984, Report on the Hemisphere, COHA maintained that the elections "threatened to augment internal factionalism and up the ante in the four year-old civil war."²⁴

The fact that Salvadorans were required by law to vote was seen as a sinister dimension of the election process, while COHA's reports on the Nicaraguan elections, in which the citizens are also obligated to vote, suggested that the Sandinistas "may be about to stage one of the most honest elections in Central American history."²⁵ No mention was made of censorship, imprisonment of opposition political and labor groups, or the fact that military personnel would have to vote in their barracks--though Salvadoran military personnel could not vote at all.

Reports of civilian massacres or intimidation of opposition groups in Salvador are given maximum coverage in COHA press releases, but little is said of the similar problems in Nicaragua. Birns was asked by The Heritage Foundation to describe what his organization does to expose the plight of the Miskito Indians, 20,000 of whom have fled Nicaragua. He offered a few 1982 press releases on the subject--and they attacked reports of repression of the Indians as "groundless" or "exaggerated."²⁶ He cited limited financial and personnel resources as the reasons for the lack of material on the Miskitos, though COHA has sponsored missions to Nicaragua to examine prison conditions and other issues.

²² "International Support for Nicaraguan Revolution Seen Eroding as Sandinista Actions Raise Fear of a Drift to Authoritarianism," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, March 23, 1984, p. 1.

²³ "El Salvador's Elections: A 'Downright Phony' Event in a Country without a Free Press and with a 'Downright' Nasty Security Force," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, March 23, 1984, p. 1.

²⁴ "Salvador vote: Nothing solved," Washington Report on the Hemisphere, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, April 2, 1984, p. 1.

²⁵ "Nicaragua to Hold Elections by End of Year," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, February 17, 1984, p. 2.

²⁶ "Miskito Atrocity Stories Termed 'Grossly Exaggerated' and 'Groundless,'" Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, March 5, 1982; J. Michael Luhan, "Is the Nicaraguan Government Committing Atrocities Against Its Moskito [sic] Indians?," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Memorandum, March 5, 1982.

In addition to his tacit acceptance of Sandinistan claims, Birns underestimates Cuba's strategic objectives in Latin America. In a 1982 National Catholic Register interview, he said, "The close relationship between Cuba and the USSR has nullified Cuba's being seen as a symbol of innovations."²⁷ Birns's comment ignores Castro's central role in consolidating the rebel forces in El Salvador and Nicaragua under Somoza, his assistance to Grenada and Surinam, and his present arms and personnel exports to Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Concerning Nicaragua, any organization independent and critical of the Sandinista government is looked on with much unwarranted suspicion by Birns, while much of the Sandinistas' claims are repeated with a considerable lack of skepticism.

THE COMMISSION ON U.S.-CENTRAL AMERICAN RELATIONS

Background

The Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations, a spin-off from the Center for Development Policy, is a relatively new group on Latin American issues that has already made a significant contribution to the lobby against U.S. foreign policy in the region. It was founded in 1982 by Lindsey Mattison, a former anti-war activist who worked for Business Executives Move for Peace in Vietnam. Headed by Robert E. White, the Carter Administration's last ambassador to El Salvador, the Commission, principally through its congressional testimony and media contacts, has helped expose congressionally sanctioned U.S. covert action in Nicaragua, and alleged ties between Salvadoran military and government leaders and death squad activity.

Reports and testimony by Commission members such as Dick Clark, former U.S. Senator from Iowa, Lt. Col. John H. Buchanan, USMC (Ret.), and Patricia Derian, Carter's former Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, dispute the Reagan Administration's claims of a Sandinista military buildup or human rights improvements in El Salvador.

The Commission describes itself as "a non-partisan citizens' group" in its statement of purpose.²⁸ Though it does include some mainstream current and former government officials, military, business, and religious leaders, lobbyists and academics, its policies reflect the political bias of its founder and some of the leftist organizations included in its membership.²⁹

²⁷ Bennett and Hayes, op. cit.

²⁸ "Statement of Purpose," Commission on United States-Central American Relations.

²⁹ Organizations include: Institute for Food and Development Policy, Oxfam America, Global Justice Program-American Friends Service Committee, Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, Committee for National Security, Institute for Policy Studies, and North American Congress on Latin America.

Funding

Foundations that support the Center for Development Policy and its projects like the Commission include: the ARCA Foundation, Disarm Education Fund, Kunstadter Family Foundation, J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation, Stewart R. Mott Charitable Trust, Ottinger Foundation, Rockefeller Family Trusts, Stern Fund and the Youth Project.

Approach to Latin American Issues

The testimony and reports by Robert White, the Commission's chairman, constitute the principal contribution to the lobby against U.S. aid to El Salvador. A foreign service officer in Honduras and Nicaragua, White was ambassador to El Salvador before he was replaced in 1981. White has since attacked the Reagan Administration for protecting Salvadoran military and government officials allegedly responsible for death squad activity.

White has insisted that U.S. military aid contributed to the deterioration of human rights and right-wing violence in El Salvador, a position refuted by the Salvadoran bishops. Bishop Marco Revelo, head of the Salvadoran Bishops Conference, has asserted that the bishops "believe the military aid is necessary because the government (and it was a government legitimately constituted) needs to protect itself and the people from the violence."³⁰

White also accused Roberto d'Aubuisson, a Salvadoran presidential candidate of backing right-wing death squads. White's strongest evidence to date against d'Aubuisson and other powerful Salvadorans surfaced in a New York Times article published March 3, 1984. The article featured the testimony of a former official who asserted that the death squads were run by d'Aubuisson, Jose Guillermo Garcia, the former minister of defense, and Eugenio Vides Casanova, the present minister of defense.

The informant's uncorroborated story made headlines in the Times and on network news. The Times later discovered that the former official had received \$50,000 from the Center for Development Policy. Disclosure of the payment, in addition to the fact that White's informant wrongly identified Arturo Muyshondt as a sponsor of right-wing violence, have undermined the informant's credibility. The Commission, nevertheless, continues to circulate White's testimony and related reports.

³⁰ Bishop Marco Revelo, "Notes on El Salvador," American Catholic Conference transcript of March 22, 1984 press conference held at the Dupont Plaza Hotel, Washington, D.C., pp. 3-4. Subsequent interviews with all six members of the Salvadoran hierarchy corroborate Revelo's statement.

Given White's concern about repression of democratic elements within Salvador, it is interesting to note that the former ambassador demonstrates no pressing need to address the Sandinistas' censorship of the press or imprisonment of political opposition and labor leaders. Indeed, in a 1982 article for the New York Times Magazine, White maintained that "Sandinista Nicaragua has been more respectful of human rights than any other Central American Republic except Costa Rica."³¹

Reports and testimony produced by White and other members of the Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations echo his consistent attacks on U.S. military aid for the Salvadoran government and the Nicaraguan contras. Most of the testimony and reports are the fruits of the Commission's strategy of organizing consciousness-raising tours of Central American trouble spots with an intensive followup of congressional and media contacts upon the visitors' return.

A labor delegation to El Salvador, organized by the Commission and accompanied by members of its staff and Janet Shenk of the pro-Cuban North American Congress on Latin America, returned from Central America to advise the AFL-CIO to withhold its support for U.S. military aid. The AFL-CIO leadership concurred with the delegation.³²

The Commission has also made its mark in the media through the testimony of retired military officers who dismiss the Reagan Administration's concern about Nicaragua's arms buildup. Lt. Col. John Buchanan, a retired Marine Corps pilot, inspected Nicaraguan and Honduran military facilities. Returning to the United States, he discounted the threat posed by Nicaragua's armed forces, the largest in Central American history, to its neighbors.³³

³¹ Robert White, "Central America: The Problem That Won't Go Away," New York Times Sunday Magazine, July 18, 1982.

³² "Labor Report on El Salvador," Center for Development Policy summary of a longer report. "El Salvador: Labor, Terror, and Peace," the delegation's official report was distributed to 15,000 local unions throughout the U.S. following the June 1983 trip. The resolution included the following: "The AFL-CIO reiterates its insistence that aid to the government of El Salvador be made contingent upon its progress in implementing the land reform program, protecting trade union rights, establishing a just judicial system, and bringing the right-wing 'death squads' under control. Until we are satisfied that progress is being made in these areas, the AFL-CIO will not support military aid to the government of El Salvador."

³³ Buchanan's views have been widely reported. The Newsweek Magazine cover story: "America's Secret War: Target: Nicaragua," which exposed covert support for the contras and Honduran government troops featured Buchanan's view that the Cuban-Nicaraguan military threat was exaggerated by the U.S.

Lindsey Mattison explains why the Commission investigates human rights conditions in El Salvador, but not Nicaragua. "If you send people to Salvador, they come back talking about U.S. foreign policy. If you send people to Nicaragua, some come back talking about whether socialism works. I'm interested in U.S. foreign policy. I'm not interested in the Sandinistas."³⁴

Mattison's background as a long-time political activist suggests he is most interested in halting U.S. aid and trade with America's anti-communist allies and friends while encouraging a resumption of diplomatic ties and trade with communist countries like Cuba and Vietnam. Mattison previously worked for Business Executives Move for Peace in Vietnam and was a co-director of the Center for International Peace. An offshoot of the Institute for Policy Studies, the Center for International Peace sponsors projects that oppose U.S. aid to right-wing regimes, and calls for rapprochement with Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Mattison now heads the Center for Development Policy, which opposes U.S. investment in the developing world, trade with authoritarian governments, and the transfer of nuclear energy technology to such governments, believing that there is a link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons capability. Principal targets of CDP's Commission on U.S.-Asian Relations are Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines. Anne B. Zill, the principal architect of the U.S. nuclear freeze movement, is a trustee of CDP.

Many of the political lobby groups and their representatives on the Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations, including the Institute for Policy Studies and some of its spin-offs, have been active in the disarmament movement or the pro-Cuba lobby or both. The Commission's public relations are arranged by Fenton Communications, which has also handled accounts for the Sandinista government and Grenada under Maurice Bishop.

The Commission's stated rejection of Reagan Administration policies³⁵ reflects its bond with the Carter Administration and the Linowitz Commission's perspective on political change in the Third World.³⁶ Members of the Commission include Carter appointees who helped shape his decision to withdraw military support from Somoza and isolate right-wing governments while normalizing relations with Cuba and providing initial assistance to the new Sandinista government.³⁷

³⁴ Mattison explained his approach during an interview with the author on April 23, 1984.

³⁵ "Statement of Purpose."

³⁶ According to United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, the Linowitz Commission's recommendations "requiring abandoning the strategic perspective which has shaped U.S. policy from the Monroe Doctrine down to the eve of the Carter Administration, at the center of which was a conception of the national interest and a belief in the moral legitimacy of its defense." Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 59.

³⁷ Former Carter Administration appointees include: Patricia Derian, former Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights; Robert Paster, former member, National Security Council; and Wayne S. Smith, former Chief of Mission, Cuba.

The Sandinista power grab in Nicaragua and the launching of a bloody civil war in Salvador by guerrilla forces in part were the fruits of that policy. Eventually, Carter was forced to try new measures that included arms assistance to the Salvadoran government and the Nicaraguan insurgents. The Commission, however, tenaciously clings to the political perspective Carter ultimately rejected.

CENTRAL AMERICAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE (CAHI)

Background

The Central American Historical Institute, established at Georgetown University's Intercultural Center in 1982, is an affiliate of the Instituto Historico Centroamericano in Managua, a Nicaraguan quasi-government information bureau that articulates the official Sandinista position on virtually all domestic and foreign policy issues in its publications and staff testimony.

Funding

The two Institutes not only receive support from the Jesuits--one Jesuit priest serves as director of the two operations and Georgetown, a Jesuit university, donated the space for the Institute's office--but also from Maryknoll, a Catholic missionary order headquartered in Ossining, New York, which pays the salary of at least one Managua staffer. Maryknoll has been a proponent of the Sandinista revolution since a Maryknoll priest, Miguel D'Escoto, now the Sandinista Foreign Minister, made contact with the Sandinista Liberation Front in the mid-1970s.

Approach to Latin American Issues

The Instituto and its Georgetown counterpart claim to be "alternative" news bureaus, but never provide a forum for those likely to be censored by the Sandinista regime, such as Catholic Church officials and opposition party leaders. CAHI's real objectives are amply illustrated in its funding request which appears in the World Council of Churches 1983 Resource Sharing Book.

There, the Georgetown Institute is described as an "Information Centre which will not only act as a news centre but also as a channel of communication to and from Nicaragua." Other services the Institute would provide, according to a request to the World Council of Churches for \$36,560 to establish it, included: a telex service to send news to various centers in Europe and America; an independent monthly bulletin "containing a critical but constructive review of the major events occurring in the country"; and a "forum for encounter" to meet with the media, church leaders, and others.³⁸

³⁸ World Council of Churches 1983 Resource Sharing Book, pp. 279-280.

The fact that CAHI would be little more than a conduit for the official Sandinista Party line is made clear in the WCC funding request which states:

The news has largely projected a colourless if not distorted image of the ongoing process in Nicaragua, often in the absence of corroborating background [sic] information. Moreover, an increasing number of organizations in Europe and America in general in addition to cooperating agencies and solidarity committees have drawn attention to the lack of regular, speedy news, above all at the time when Nicaragua is being criticized by conservative circles throughout the world press. The government of Nicaragua does not have the necessary resources to meet this challenge.³⁹

Despite such evidence of the CAHI's specific purpose, it still describes itself as an "independent, non-governmental research" center. Further, both the Managua and the Georgetown centers' loose affiliation with Catholic religious orders confers a measure of moral legitimacy on their analysis of news events in Nicaragua. The Nicaragua Reader identifies CAHI as a "Jesuit-affiliated research institute based in Managua, Nicaragua."⁴⁰

Staffers in Managua and Georgetown acknowledge that neither institute is formally associated with the Catholic Church. But the Institutes' religious contacts have helped them create a positive image of the Nicaraguan revolution, particularly in Catholic periodicals like the liberal weekly, The National Catholic Reporter, and the moderate Our Sunday Visitor. Their reports on Sandinista achievements and the regime's confrontation with the official Catholic Church closely parallel or include excerpts from CAHI publications.⁴¹

But when such newspapers quote CAHI reports or its director, Jesuit Father Alvaro Arguello, they neglect to mention that the priest headed the Sandinista-controlled Nicaraguan Council of State. Further, descriptions of the organization as "Jesuit-affiliated" conceal the fact that the Georgetown Institute is not "non-profit" nor is its director registered as a foreign agent. Confusion about the Georgetown Institute's financial status leaves open some serious questions about the organization's

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John Rosset and John Vandermeer, eds., The Nicaraguan Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 65.

⁴¹ In the July 18, 1982, edition of Our Sunday Visitor, Fr. Alvaro Arguello, director of the Instituto Historico Centroamericano, described the principles of the Sandinista government as "a mixed economy, political pluralism, and a policy of non-alignment in foreign affairs." In fact, the Sandinista government's policies are almost directly opposite of Arguello's claims.

specific identity and the propriety of university officials allowing it to operate on campus.

In Managua, the Instituto Historico Centroamericano is a fixture on pro-Sandinista tours of projects and institutions where the revolution's supporters testify on behalf of its achievements. When foreign journalists visit Nicaragua, the Instituto's staff is on hand to provide party-line answers about the plight of the Miskito Indians on the Atlantic Coast or the conflict between the Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy and the government.

Indeed, the Instituto Historico Centroamericano played a prominent role in supplying what were presented as victims of abuse by anti-Sandinista forces at a forum sponsored by Senator Kennedy in July of this year. Through the Instituto, the Sandinista government not only selected the alleged victims, but also provided Father Gundrum, who was presented as an apolitical, ordinary parish priest, despite his rifle-toting commitment to the Sandinista revolution. The role of the Instituto in the forum's arrangements remained concealed until weeks later, when the New Republic published a story revealing the egregious bias and inaccuracy of the witnesses' testimony.⁴²

Before the March 1983 visit to Nicaragua by Pope John Paul II, staffers distributed copies of "Envio," the Instituto's monthly bulletin published in four languages, as well as special reports that played down the personal popularity and moral authority of Managua's Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo. Nevertheless, at the papal mass, the ovation accorded Obando was as long as the one given the Pope, while the Sandinista comandantes were booed. After the mass, "Envio" published anonymous reports that suggested the Pope's inappropriate emphasis on respect for the bishops and for Nicaraguan parents' right to give their children a Catholic education--both critical issues between the official Church and the government--caused the subsequent attacks on the pontiff at the mass.⁴³ "Envio" is also distributed by CAHI.

The testimony of Sandinista defector Miguel Bolanos Hunter, a former bureaucrat in the regime's security apparatus, disputes the Sandinistas' claims that the people, rather than the government, demonstrated hostility to the Pope and local church leaders. Bolanos described the government's efforts to undermine the official Church and said that the Instituto has been infiltrated by Sandinistas who quietly censored its publications. To make the Instituto's analysis of events in Nicaragua "generally reliable"

⁴² The author of the story concludes that "to portray (the anti-Sandinista forces) as a mere gang of thugs, and to do so on evidence supplied or engineered by the Sandinistas, is to be party to a vilification that has no rightful place in the debate over U.S. policy." See Joshua Muravchik, "Manipulating the Miskitos," The New Republic, August 6, 1984, p. 25.

they were ordered to include a smattering of comments critical of the government.⁴⁴

"Envio" and other Instituto reports have been reprinted in anthologies like The Nicaraguan Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire (Grove Press, 1983). In this anthology, the Instituto supplied analysis on Nicaragua's state of national emergency, political pluralism, the trade union movement, and the contras. The articles offered only government officials, staunchly pro-Sandinista Nicaraguans or foreigners, or unnamed individuals as sources.

THE COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR (CISPES)

Background

The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) was established in 1980 and operated as the American wing of the World Front in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. Identified in the Congressional Record by Representative Jack Fields (R.-Tex.) as "the major grassroots organization opposing U.S. efforts to prevent a Communist takeover" in El Salvador,⁴⁵ CISPES works with other leftist information and lobby groups profiled above.

According to J. Michael Waller, author of "CISPES: A Guerrilla Propaganda Network,"⁴⁶ CISPES was founded by Farid Handal, a Salvadoran with ties to the General Command of the FMLN, the Salvadoran guerrilla front, for the purpose of protesting U.S. support for the embattled government of El Salvador while promoting the guerrillas' cause. Documents captured by the Salvadoran army and later made public by the U.S. State Department substantiate this.

CISPES, during its first East Coast Conference in Solidarity with the Salvadoran People, recommended Americans "oppose all forms of U.S. intervention in El Salvador," including all humanitarian aid.

Funding

According to Waller, the U.S. Communist Party and the United States Peace Council were "instrumental" in providing seed money

⁴³ "John Paul II in Nicaragua: Chronicle-Report [sic] on the Pope's Trip," Envio Numero 21, March 1983.

⁴⁴ Scott Walter, "Nicaragua's Cheerleaders," Catholicism in Crisis, January 1984, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Congressman Jack Fields, "Who Really Lobbies Against Aid to El Salvador," Congressional Record, April 28, 1981, pp. E1890-1.

⁴⁶ J. Michael Waller, "CISPES: A Guerrilla Propaganda Network," (Washington, D.C.: Council for Inter-American Security).

for the formation of CISPES. R. Bruce McColm of Freedom House, the New York human rights organization, confirms that the United States Peace Council has helped finance CISPES.⁴⁷ Currently, CISPES raises its funds mainly through mass mailings and monthly dues charged its chapters.

Approach to Latin American Issues

CISPES organizers in the U.S. seek to disassociate themselves from Handal and other foreign representatives of political or insurgent groups and instead are active in broad-based coalitions that represent domestic groups like the National Council of Churches, organizations for the handicapped, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Democratic Socialists of America. CISPES, reports Waller, also publicly allies itself with affiliated movements like the National Network in Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua, Coordinadoro de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Salvadoreño, and the Committee in Solidarity with Viet Nam, Kampuchea, and Laos.

CISPES organizes protests on university campuses against U.S. aid to Salvador and uses the slogan: "No More Vietnams." Yet, as Waller notes, it is questionable whether CISPES truly seeks its stated goal of reducing the suffering in Salvador due to war. In fact, CISPES may favor continued violence so long as it brings the leftists victory. For example, a flyer published by the Committee in Solidarity with Viet Nam, Kampuchea, and Laos, which publicized a "Vietnam-El Salvador" demonstration that drew representatives from CISPES and the FDR, the political wing of the Salvadoran guerrilla front, announced: "Viet Nam has won. El Salvador will win."

Since its founding, CISPES has participated in such activities as: dissemination of a forged State Department "Dissent Paper on El Salvador and Central America"; a 1981 march on the Pentagon in which it displayed a banner proclaiming "Support the FDR-FMLN"; a 1983 "mobilization" on Washington's Vietnam War memorial to ensure "No More Viet Nam Wars"; a 1984 demonstration with the African National Congress, a Marxist terrorist group; lobbying directly and through letter-writing campaigns to urge Congress to vote against appropriations for El Salvador; and association with foreign diplomats from such countries as Nicaragua, communist Grenada, and communist Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

The organizations outlined above comprise the left's Latin American lobby. They influence the public debate in Congress and

⁴⁷ R. Bruce McColm, El Salvador: Peaceful Revolution or Armed Struggle? (New York: Freedom House, 1982), p. 39.

in the media with little accountability. Even after the Salvadoran Archbishop repudiated the figures on civilian casualties by Socorro Juridicos, a former archdiocesan agency, for example, the discredited statistics continued to surface in reports and testimony produced by these groups. Congressional committees' and the media's acceptance of such biased materials, to some extent, are the fruit of the lobby's coalition-building techniques and the actions taken by some groups to obscure their ideological bent by presenting their efforts as objective reporting.

Even a cursory analysis of the information and testimony produced by these groups suggests that the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments and the Salvadoran insurgents are the primary beneficiaries of this lobby's double standard for human rights violations. Responsible critics of U.S. policy should question whether their willingness to give such groups a platform best serves American efforts to promote democracy and to protect allies from the threat of a victory by Marxist forces.

Church and labor groups backing these organizations may want to reconsider their support of movements that demonstrate little regard for religious freedom or collective bargaining. And others may decide to rely less on the predictably biased data and analyses produced by the lobby. It is a bias consistently unsympathetic to U.S. and democratic interests in Latin America.

Prepared for The Heritage Foundation by
Joan Frawley